

Exploring the Developmental Outcomes of First-Year Experience Seminars (in-progress)



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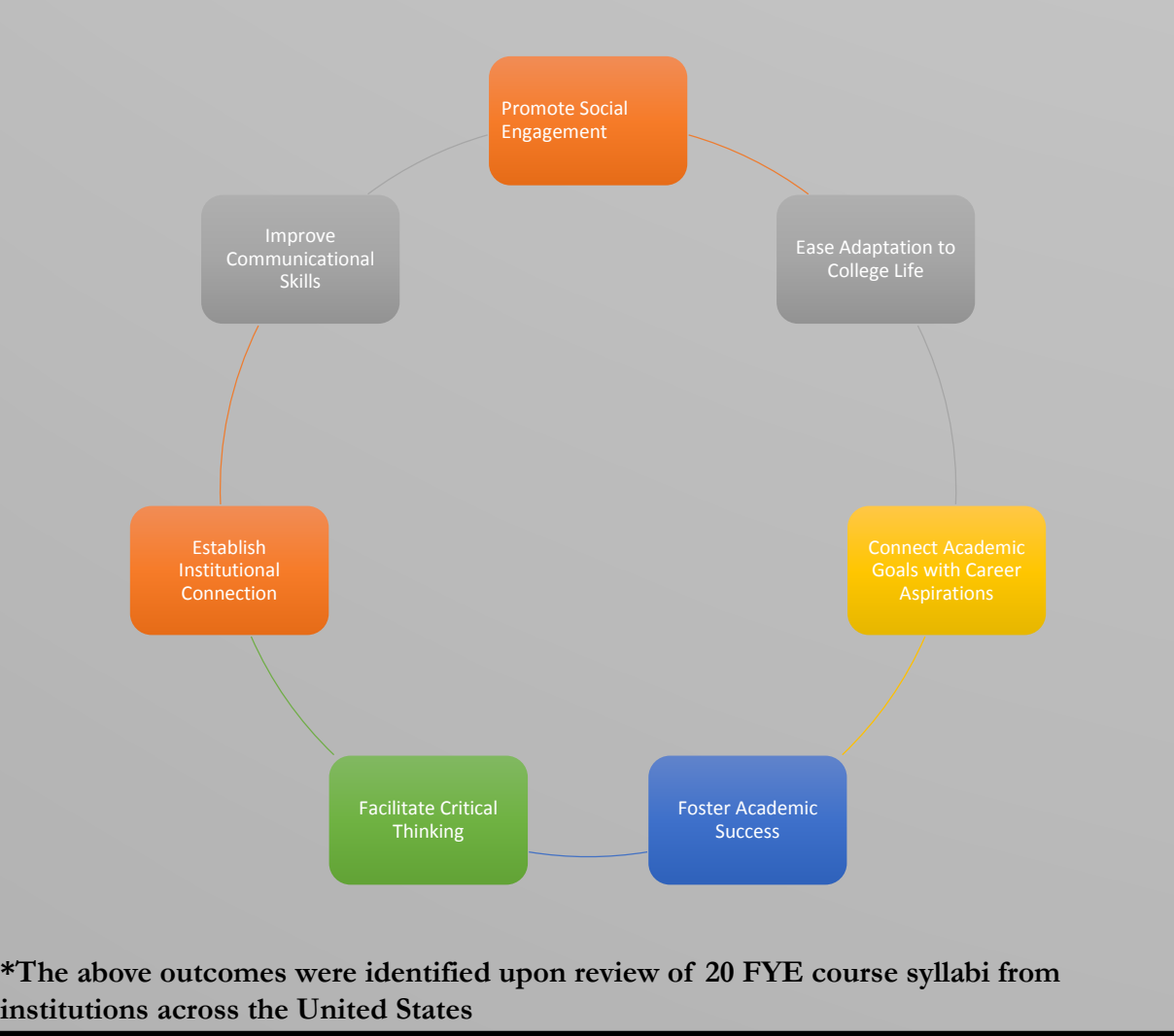
Overview

- A substantial amount of research shows that the first year of college is a “make or break” time for most students, with an estimated 60% of incoming students withdrawing before the beginning of their sophomore year (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
- Additional research also shows that 2/3 of students’ gains in cognitive and intellectual skill occur during their first year (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).
- Finding like this have led to the nearly universal use of **First Year Experience (FYE) Seminars**.

Purpose

- While the breadth of research regarding the effects of FYE seminars on retention and engagement is expansive (Kuh, 2008; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, and Associates, 1989), there is a gap in the literature as to **which course practices are most effective in achieving the developmental learning outcomes** commonly desired by FYE courses.
- This study proposes that students’ experiences be explored from a process-oriented framework in order to identify which course exercises most effectively guide students toward the developmental goals of FYE seminars.
- The developmental outcomes in question are those dealing with cognitive, intellectual, and interpersonal maturation.

Common Developmental Outcomes



Theoretical Framework

- Jack Mezirow’s **transformative learning theory** looks to trigger an “expansion of consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview” (Elias, 1997, pp. 1).
- Mezirow (1991, 2000) posits that transformative learning occurs in individuals through critical reflection, reflective discourse, and reflective action.

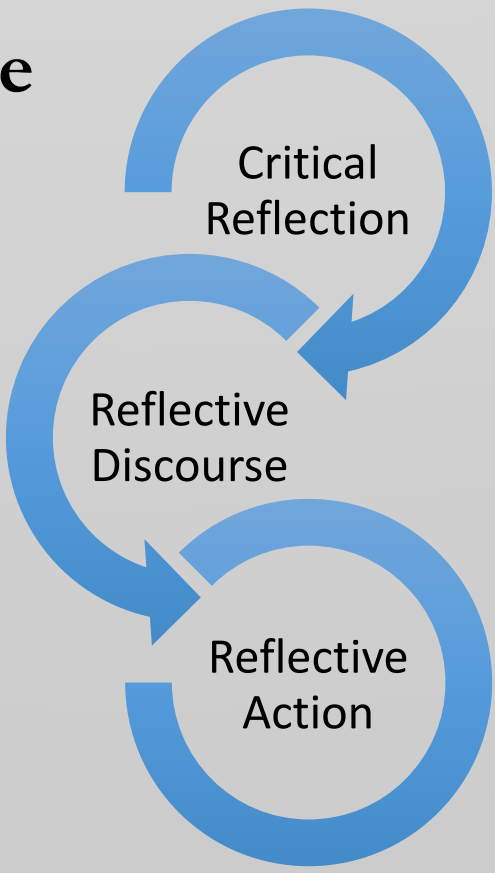
Research Objectives

- Identify the FYE seminar course practices that best promote the students’ cognitive, intellectual, and interpersonal development.
- Identify why the identified course practices resonated with students.
- Use students opinions, observations, and interpretations to suggest improvements and assessment options for future FYE seminars.

Research Questions

- What FYE seminar practices best aid students’ cognitive and intellectual development?
- What FYE seminar practices best improve inter- and intrapersonal development?
- What FYE seminar practices or activities best promote behavior change?

The Transformative Learning Process



Participant Selection

Because of its focus on perception, the study will utilize a phenomenological research design in order to thoroughly explore students’ experiences.

This study will employ what Plano Clark & Creswell (2010) define as purposeful, typical case sampling, a method often used when a researcher is studying a small, specific population. Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the observed group is selected based on the judgment of the researcher.

To ensure that a broad sample is constructed, two to three students from at least 4 course sections will be chosen for interviews. Alternatively, students in participating courses can be asked to fill out an online questionnaire.

Data Collection

The processes of Transformative Learning Theory will be used to develop interview questions that explore and assess students’ epistemological maturation.

Interviews with selected students will be recorded using Apple computer software and converted to MP4 computer files.

Data Analysis

Data (recorded interviews or online questionnaires) will be analyzed according to the preparation and coding methods proposed by Plano Clark and Creswell (2010).

The coding process will be split into three inductive phases: prelim. exploratory analysis, coding, and building (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). The identified themes will be presented in a results section and used to discuss the implications of the study’s findings.

Interview Questions

1. What course activities helped you to reflect on your own personal experiences?
2. What course activities best led you to rethink and/or revise your own beliefs or opinions?
3. What course activities best led you to think about the beliefs or opinions of others?
4. What course activities best changed how you interact with peers, professors, or other personnel?
5. Did any of the course’s activities cause you to act differently in a certain situation than you would have in the past? If so, how?

Implications

Because it will explore students’ perspectives on the course practices used in FYE seminars, this study has the potential to highlight the instructional methods and activities that best resonate with students.

At the same time, the transformation-guided interview questions can help identify which course practices facilitate cognitive, intellectual, and personal development.

The results of the study can provide FYE seminar instructors with valuable information they can use to tailor their courses to best meet students’ needs.

References

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